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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1782

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2863

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1210

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3250

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2636

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000129

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR MARR KPAO KG

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ OFFICIALS RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT MANAS --
OR ANYTHING ELSE

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Kyrgyz government officials awkwardly avoided contact with EmbOff at a February 6 dinner marking Kyrgyzstan's second annual International Santa Claus Festival. Kyrgyz tourism officials purposefully introduced EmbOff to the new Vice Prime Minister, the new Deputy Foreign Minister, and members of Parliament, all but one of whom refused even polite conversation. A lower-level contact confided that government officials had received instructions not to discuss Manas Air Base. A Chinese representative at the dinner expressed approval for Bakiyev's announcement of plans to close the Base, saying the Base was "a headache" for the Chinese leadership. END SUMMARY

KYRGYZSTAN: FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE

¶2. (U) Kyrgyzstan has based its tourism strategy on a Swedish logistics company's report showing Santa Claus should be based here to most efficiently reach the world's children. The Director of the State Agency on Tourism, Turusbek Mamashov, claims that promoting Kyrgyzstan as the home of Santa Claus and inviting foreign countries to send their Santa-like figures for an annual festival will show that Kyrgyzstan is a friendly country, open to all. Last year, President Bakiyev met with the six Santas who came from around the world for the first festival. This year, Santas from 16 countries, including from the United States, came to the festival, though both Bakiyev and Prime Minister Chudinov were too busy to meet with them. Instead, Vice Prime Minister Uktomkhan Abdullayeva opened the festival and hosted a private dinner February 6 for participants, diplomats, and government officials.

AN AWKWARD DINNER

¶3. (C) Mamashov and the working-level organizer of the festival, a recent alumnus of the UGRAD exchange program,

purposefully seated EmbOff at the head table next to Abdullayeva and Deputy Foreign Minister Baktygul Kalambekova at the dinner, even though tables with foreign Ambassadors and wealthy Kyrgyz businessmen were nearby. The alumnus, conspicuously adorned in a Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs lanyard, explained that Mamashov was frustrated by Bakiyev's announcement on the Base closure and hoped to give EmbOff a chance to talk to the ranking Kyrgyz officials at the dinner.

¶4. (C) Abdullayeva and Kalambekova did their best to avoid verbal or eye contact with EmbOff, even when loudly introduced by Mamashov, instead staring at their plates for most of dinner. Abdullayeva slowly warmed to conversation about Kyrgyzstan's cuisine, but excused herself when asked if she had ever visited America. Mamashov also attempted to introduce Vice Speaker of Parliament Isabekov and two other Deputies, but the three refused to acknowledge EmbOff and walked away. The alumnus claimed that government officials have been told not to talk about the Base because the issue is not resolved, and they are reluctant to try to defend Bakiyev's decision, because "everyone understands the Russian deal is simply cash for Bakiyev's re-election campaign."

THE CHINESE ANGLE

¶5. (C) China was represented at the dinner by Ge Zhi Li, the chairman of the Beijing Asia-Europe Continent Information Consulting Co Ltd (www.aeci.com.cn), which he claimed provides diplomatic services for the Chinese government. He said he has headed Soviet-Chinese, Russian-Chinese, and even Kyrgyz-Chinese friendship societies on behalf of the Chinese

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government. Ge Zhi Li told EmbOff he was sent from Beijing to attend the festival, but mostly to build relations with new Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Sarbayev, whom he knows well from Sarbayev's time as Ambassador in Beijing. He added that the Chinese government interprets Sarbayev's recent appointment as a re-orientation in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy.

¶6. (C) Ge Zhi Li claimed the Chinese leadership considered the Manas Base a "headache" which allowed the Americans to push the Kyrgyz and others in Central Asia too quickly towards democracy, creating instability in the region. He said the Chinese government therefore supported the removal of the Base, though its voice was much weaker than the Russians'. He believed that the Russians were eager to "get revenge against America for South Ossetia" and had pushed very hard on the issue against a weak Kyrgyz government.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Manas Air Base remains the issue of the day, even when officials will not talk about it -- or anything else. This scene from a cultural dinner shows that some members of the Kyrgyz government are reluctant to interact with Embassy officers in the current environment, and some disagree with Bakiyev's decision to close the Base.

GFOELLER